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Modified: 26 Aug 2010

[Edit this debate](#)POSTED BY: **Leika** KARMA: **139****Vote totals:**

The Scottish government's release of Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the only person to have been convicted of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, has prompted accusations that Britain ordered the release as part of an agreement on oil and gas. The West has long been willing to entertain dictatorial and undemocratic regimes when their economic interests align. Do Western powers have a duty to oppose and sanction dictators?

Yes: **50%**No: **25%**Neutral: **25%**

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All the Yes points

1. The West's ideals require it to act against dictatorship
2. If we don't hang together, we will hang together
3. Free peoples of the world, stand up for your fellow man

[Add a new Yes point](#)**All the No points**

1. State's shouldn't act against another's sovereignty
2. Collective punishment is unacceptable
3. States are not ethical actors
4. Sanctioning dictatorships hurts the very people we aim to help.

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?**Yes, because...****The West's ideals require it to act against dictatorship**

The ideals that the West adheres to today were formed out of the Enlightenment in the 18th Century. What were huge philosophical advances then stressed liberty, both economically as well as from oppressive government. The beliefs of John Stuart Mill – on Liberty – and John Locke – on a people's 'social contract' with the state – have become enshrined in Western political philosophy. If the West professes to believe in freedom and the pursuit of common good it should be willing to extend that wish for freedom to others.

No, because...

Quote: "If the West professes to believe in freedom and the pursuit of common good it should be willing to extend that wish for freedom to others."

The West's ideals do not require it to act against dictatorship.

The Prop. base their argument on the above quoted statement:

1) The West believes in freedom and the pursuit of the common good.

2) Therefore, the West should be extending/willing to extend that wish and pursuit to other peoples.

A desire for freedom does not automatically imply an expansionist regime or theory. It is entirely possible, for example, to wish for freedom for one's own people and remain out of the affairs of other nations. See U.S. foreign policy in the early 20th century. It was isolationist, but based on the same political philosophy as the West today.

Therefore, the West's ideals do not require it to act against dictatorship in other nations.

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

If we don't hang together, we will hang together

Dictatorial regimes typically imprison individual's without trial, suppress freedom of speech and neglect all or part of their population.

Regardless of Western ideals, such people should be opposed on principle, if not in solidarity with the people they oppress but out of concern that such conditions could breed a 'failed state'.

Even if such a state of affairs is avoided, such states provide a breeding ground for extremism. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers from the 9/11 attacks on the US world trade centre were from Saudi Arabia.

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

Free peoples of the world, stand up for your fellow man

As a democracy (albeit not a perfect one), in which ordinary people are in control of our destiny, we who can must stand up for the rights of our fellow humans, especially those who have no power to stand up for themselves and are oppressed as a result.

No, because...

Firstly, a moral obligation to other human beings is presumed. I would challenge the Prop. to prove such a moral obligation exists to every human being on Earth.

Secondly, 'the right to vote' is seen as highly important in democracies because of democratic culture. However, voting rates in the USA and UK are incredibly low: typically, less than 30% vote for local council elections in the UK. How can the West export something to other nations that it largely ignores?

Thirdly, people are quite capable of forming revolutions themselves. The Russian Revolution occurred despite oppression from the Tsar; the Spanish Civil War happened despite the dissolution and recall of the army after the failed coup; China and Kenya both saw civil uprisings and unrest in the last five years due to democratic and human rights abuses.

Fourthly and finally, how does the Prop. propose to ensure that in their move to stand up for human rights and democracy worldwide, they are in fact pushing the agenda that the people of the state in question? What of states that do not wish for democracy or Western ideals, values or culture? (One thinks of the Middle Eastern states in particular.) Do they have the right to refuse democracy?

The Prop. perhaps erroneously assumes that democracy is the value worldwide that it is in the West, and proposes enforcing it on other states in the name of 'human rights for the fellow man.'

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

You speak of 'states'. I look at this argument from the perspective of the individual. I live in a democracy (the UK) and am lucky to do so. Because the people are represented, we now have a fairer, more peaceful, more civilised, more progressive society and a government which represents the needs and feelings of the people (not precisely but better than most). It is clear to me that peoples in other parts of the world are not lucky enough to live in a democracy. They have no say in how the state affects them or represents them: their personal liberty, identity, values or freedoms. I feel it is morally obligatory for citizens of democracies to use the representation we have to help those oppressed peoples of the world. It could be argued that democracies' acts are not always the will of the people and that they can have a negative impact on other states. However, this is because they are still not democratic enough. There is no counter argument for nations to be less democratic and this somehow having a positive effect on individuals/peoples...is there?

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No, because...

State's shouldn't act against another's sovereignty

States are sovereign entities and other states do not have the right to intervene in their affairs, even if they consider their intervention to be purely altruistic (which is arguably never the case). Sanctions can put limits on a state's actions and are in that way an intervention. It would be unacceptable to impose sanctions on the basis of a value judgement – that a country's leader is a 'dictator' – and attempt to curtail the very freedoms one is seeking to espouse.

Additional:

For a democracy to enforce its values upon another state is damaging to the second state's sovereignty and right to govern itself.

The assumption that the Prop. makes is that peoples in a democracy understand enough about the people in the second state to be able to assist them in gaining democracy. I would like to point out that democracy is sometimes not desirable or wanted, and attempts at 'enforcing' a democracy upon second states has nearly always failed and resulted in further conflict. The installation of a democracy was one of the USA and UK's aims in Iraq and Afghanistan. Needless to say, it isn't working.

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

Imposing sanctions can be the only way to punish a regime. This can be targeted at the leadership so as to reduce the problem of collective punishment. The top leaders in a dictatorship often desire various luxuries and build up large amounts of 'stolen' money. It is therefore possible to target sanctions against luxury goods that will do very little to affect the general population of the country being sanctioned or else the foreign bank accounts of the leadership can be frozen.

This has been tried against North Korea and were unfortunately not very successful. The list of items forbidden to North Korea 'included many of Kim's favorite indulgences -- lobster, flat-screen televisions, DVDs, iPods, furs, fountain pens, fine wines and spirits, purebred horses and porcelain, caviar.' However Kim already had stockpiles of these luxuries so the sanctions had little effect. Freezing bank accounts had more effect when the US treasury blacklisted the Macao-based Banco Delta Asia North Korea struck back by refusing to negotiate until it was reopened.^[1]

1. ^ Barbara Demick, Punishing North Korea won't be easy, Los Angeles Times, 11th June 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/11/world/fq-korea-sanctions11>

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No, because...

Collective punishment is unacceptable

Imposing sanctions unfairly punishes a population for the faults of its leader. When the West imposed sanctions on Iraq following the first Gulf War, Iraq's people suffered huge privations. Infant mortality rates that had been in decline rose - among them a high proportion of deaths from malnutrition (1).

- (1) Garfield, R. (1999) 'Morbidity and Mortality Among Iraqi Children from 1990 Through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions' (online): <http://www.casi.org.uk/info/garfield/dr-garfield.html1>

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

No, because...

States are not ethical actors

For all its high-minded rhetoric, the West's stance towards others is taken less for moral reasons but rather on political and economic grounds.

It is absurd to suggest that the West should or indeed does oppose dictatorship on principle.

The West has been perfectly happy to support Saudi Arabia and other oppressive regimes in the Middle East. Likewise, the US has

offered support to numerous right-wing governments in South America who have committed countless human rights violations.

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Should the West sanction dictatorships?

Yes, because...

This is a difficult question because while refusing to trade with a dictatorship can keep the ruling regime in power for longer trading and opening up to that dictatorship can do the same. The most obvious example is China, the west and China now trade extensively, China's exports were 3rd in the world worth \$1.435 trillion in 2008, while their imports were 4th at \$1.074 trillion.^[1] China's one party state has continued through this extensive period of opening up in the thirty years since 1979.

1. [^] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>

[Can you improve this point? Click here to strengthen it.](#)

No, because...

Sanctioning dictatorships hurts the very people we aim to help.

Refusing to trade with countries that are no democratic simply keeps the ruling regime in power for longer. When a country is allowed to prosper, the people will also prosper. The reason so many totalitarian governments last as long as they do is that the people are so poor and run down that they are powerless to demand change and to stand up for themselves. Furthermore, when people in the governments of these countries see the money start to trickle in, it stands to reason that oppressing the people may come second to making money.

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